

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## VIXEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," &c. &c.

CHAP. XVI. WHERE THE RED KING WAS SLAIN.

MAY had come. The red glow of the beech branches had changed to a tender green: the oaks were amber: the winding forest-paths, the deep inaccessible glades where the cattle led such a happy life, were blue with dog-violets and golden with primroses. Whitsuntide was close at hand, and good Mr. Scobel had given up his mind to church decoration, and the entertainment of his school-children with tea and buns in that delightful valley, where an iron monument, a little less artistic than a pillar post-office, marks the spot where the Red King fell.

Vixen, though not particularly fond of school-feasts, had promised to assist at this one. It was not to be a stiff or ceremonious affair. There was to be no bey of young ladies, oppressively attentive to their small charges, causing the children to drink scalding tea in a paroxysm of shyness. The whole thing was to be done in an easy and friendly manner; with no aid but that of the school mistress and master. The magnates of the land were to have no part in the festival.

"The children enjoy themselves so much more when there are no finely-dressed people making believe to wait upon them," said Mrs. Scobel; "but I know they'll be delighted to have you, Violet. They positively adore you!"

"I'm sure I can't imagine why they should," answered Violet truthfully.

"Oh, but they do. They like to look at you. When you come into the school-

room they're all in a flutter; and they point at you awfully; don't they, Miss Pierson," said Mrs. Scobel, appealing to the school-mistress.

"Yes, ma'am. I can't cure them of pointing, do what I will."

"Oh, they are dear little children," exclaimed Violet, "and I don't care how much they point at me if they really like me. They make me such nice little bob-curtseys when I meet them in the Forest, and they all seem fond of Argus. I'm sure you have made them extremely polite, Miss Pierson. I shall be very pleased to come to your school-feast, Mrs. Scobel; and I'll tell our good old Trimmer to make no end of cakes."

"My dear Violet, pray don't think of putting Mrs. Trimmer to any trouble. Your dear mamma might be angry."

"Angry at my asking for some cakes for the school-children, after being papa's wife for seventeen years! That couldn't be."

The school-feast was fixed, three weeks in advance, for the Wednesday in Whitsun week, and during the interval there were many small meteorologists in Beechdale school intent upon the changes of the moon, and all those varied phenomena from which the rustic mind draws its auguries of coming weather. The very crowing of early village cocks was regarded suspiciously by the school-children at this period. It happened that the appointed Wednesday was a day on which Mrs. Tempest had chosen to invite a few friends in a quiet way to her seven o'clock dinner; among the few Captain Winstanley, who had taken Mrs. Hawbuck's cottage for an extended period of three months. Mrs. Tempest had known all about the school-

feast a fortnight before she gave her invitations, but had forgotten the date at the moment when she arranged her little dinner. Yet she felt offended that Violet should insist upon keeping her engagement to the Scobels.

"But, dear mamma, I am of no use to you at our parties," pleaded Vixen; "if I were at all necessary to your comfort, I would give up the school-feast."

"My dear Violet, it is not my comfort I am considering; but I cannot help feeling annoyed that you should prefer to spend your evening with a herd of vulgar children—playing oranges and lemons, or kiss-in-the-ring, or some other ridiculous game, and getting yourself into a most unbecoming perspiration—to a quiet home-evening with a few friends."

"You see, mamma, I know our quiet home evenings with a few friends so well. I could tell you beforehand exactly what will happen, almost the very words people will say—how your jardinières will be admired, and how the conversation will glance off from your ferns and pelargoniums to Lady Ellangowan's orchids, and then drift back to your old china; after which the ladies will begin to talk about dress, and the wickedness of giving seven guineas for a summer bonnet, as Mrs. Jones, or Green, or Robinson has just done; from which their talk will glide insensibly to the iniquities of modern servants; and when those have been discussed exhaustively, one of the younger ladies will tell you the plot of the last novel she has had from Mudie's, with an infinite number of you knows and you sees, and then perhaps Captain Winstanley—he is coming, I suppose—will sing a French song, of which the company will understand about four words in every verse, and then you will show Mrs. Carteret your last piece of art needlework—"

"What nonsense you talk, Violet. However, if you prefer the children at Stony Cross to the society of your mother and your mother's friends, you must take your own way."

"And you will forgive me in advance, dear mamma?"

"My love, I have nothing to forgive. I only deplore a bent of mind which I can but think unladylike."

Vixen was glad to be let off with so brief a lecture. In her heart of hearts she was not at all sorry that her mother's friendly dinner should fall on a day which she had promised to spend elsewhere. It

was a treat to escape the sameness of that polite entertainment. Yes, Captain Winstanley was to be there of course, and prolonged acquaintance had not lessened her dislike to that gentleman. She had seen him frequently during his residence at the Hawbuck cottage, not at her mother's house only, but at all the best houses in the neighbourhood. He had done nothing to offend her. He had been studiously polite; and that was all. Not by one word had he reminded Violet of that moonlight walk in the Pavilion garden; not by so much as a glance or a sigh had he hinted at a hidden passion. So far she could make no complaint against him. But the attrition of frequent intercourse did not wear off the sharp edge of her dislike.

Wednesday afternoon came, and any evil auguries that had been drawn from the noontide crowing of restless village cocks was set at naught, for the weather was peerless; a midsummer sky and golden sunlight upon all things; upon white-walled cottages and orchards, and gardens where the pure lilies were beginning to blow, upon the yellow-green oak leaves and deepening bloom of the beech, and the long straight roads cleaving the heart of the forest.

Violet had arranged to drive Mr. and Mrs. Scobel in her pony-carriage. She was at the door of their snug little vicarage at three o'clock; the vivacious Titmouse tossing his head and jingling his bit, in a burst of pettishness at the aggravating behaviour of the flies.

Mrs. Scobel came fluttering out, with the vicar behind her. Both carried baskets, and behind them came an old servant, who had been Mrs. Scobel's nurse, a woman with a figure like a hogshead of wine, and a funny little head at the top, carrying a third basket.

"The buns and bread have gone straight from the village," said the vicar's wife. "How well you are looking, Violet. I hope dear Mrs. Tempest was not very angry at your coming with us."

"Dear Mrs. Tempest didn't care a straw," Vixen answered, laughing. "But she thinks me wanting in dignity for liking to have a romp with the school-children."

All the baskets were in by this time, and Titmouse was in a paroxysm of impatience; so Mr. and Mrs. Scobel seated themselves quickly, and Vixen gave her reins a little shake that meant Go, and off

went the pony at a pace which was rather like running away.

The vicar looked slightly uneasy.

"Does he always go as fast as this?" he enquired.

"Sometimes, a good deal faster. He's an old fencer, you know, and hasn't forgotten his jumping days. But of course I don't let him jump with the carriage."

"I should think not," ejaculated the vicar; "unless you wanted to commit suicide and murder. Don't you think you could make him go a little steadier? He's going rather like a dog with a tin-kettle at his tail, and if the kettle were to tip over——"

"Oh, he'll settle down presently," said Vixen coolly. "I don't want to interfere with him; it makes him ill-tempered. And if he were to take to kicking——"

"If you'll pull him up I think I'll get out and walk," said Mr. Scobel, the back of whose head was on a level with the area which the pony's hoofs would have been likely to describe in the event of kicking.

"Oh, please don't!" cried Vixen. "If you do that, I shall think you've no confidence in my driving."

She pulled Titmouse together, and got him into an unobjectionable trot; a trot which got over the ground very fast, without giving the occupants of the carriage the uncomfortable sensation of sitting behind a pony intent on getting to the sharp edge of the horizon and throwing himself over.

They were going up a long hill. Half-way up they came to the gate of the kennels. Violet looked at it with a curious half-reluctant glance that expressed the keenest pain.

"Poor papa," she sighed. "He never seemed happier than when he used to take me to see the hounds."

"Mr. Vawdrey is to have them next year," said Mrs. Scobel. "That seems right and proper. He will be the biggest man in this part of the country when the Ashbourne and Briarwood estates are united. And the duke cannot live very long—a man who gives his mind to eating and drinking, and is laid up with gout twice a year."

"Do you know when they are to be married?" asked Vixen, with an unconcerned air.

"At the end of this year, I am told. Lady Jane died last November. They would hardly have the wedding before a

twelvemonth was over. Have you seen much of Mr. Vawdrey since he came back?"

"I believe I have seen him three times: once at Lady Southminster's ball; once when he came to call upon mamma; once at kettledrum at Ellangowan, where he was in attendance upon Lady Mabel. He looked rather like a little dog at the end of a string; he had just that meekly-obedient look, combined with an expression of not wanting to be there, which you see in a dog. If I were engaged, I would not take my fiancé to kettledrums."

"Ah, Violet, when are you going to be engaged?" cried Mrs. Scobel, in a burst of playfulness. "Where is the man worthy of you?"

"Nowhere; unless Heaven would make me such a man as my father."

"You and Mr. Vawdrey were such friends when you were girl and boy, I used sometimes to fancy it would lead to a lasting attachment."

"Did you? That was a great mistake. I am not half good enough for Mr. Vawdrey. I was well enough for a play-fellow, but he wants something much nearer perfection in a wife."

"But your tastes are so similar."

"The very reason we should not care for each other."

"In joining contrasts lieth love's delight." I can't quite believe that, Violet."

"But you see the event proves it true. Here is my old playfellow, who cares for nothing but horses and hounds and a country life, devotedly attached to Lady Mabel Ashbourne, who reads Greek plays with as much enjoyment as other young ladies derive from a stirring novel, and who hasn't an idea or an attitude that is not strictly æsthetic."

"Do you know, Violet, I am very much afraid that this marriage is rather the result of calculation than genuine affection?" said Mrs. Scobel solemnly.

"Oh, no doubt it will be a grand thing to unite Ashbourne and Briarwood, but Roderick Vawdrey is too honourable to marry a girl he could not love. I would never believe him capable of such baseness," answered Violet, standing up for her old friend.

Here they turned out of the Forest, and drove through a peaceful colony consisting of half-a-dozen cottages, a rustic inn where reigned a supreme silence and sleepiness, and two or three houses in old-world gardens.



Vixen changed the conversation to buns and school-children, which agreeable themes occupied them till Titmouse had walked up a tremendously steep hill, the vicar trudging through the dust beside him; and then the deep green vale in which Rufus was slain lay smiling in the sunshine below their feet.

Perhaps the panorama to be seen from the top of that hill is absolutely the finest in the Forest—a vast champaign, stretching far away to the white walls, tiled roofs, and ancient abbey-church of Romsey; here a glimpse of winding water, there a humble village—nameless save for its inhabitants—nestling among the trees, or basking in the broad sunshine of a common.

At the top of the hill, Bates, the grey-headed groom, who had attended Violet ever since her first pony-ride, took possession of Titmouse and the chaise, while the baskets were handed over to a lad, who had been on the watch for their arrival. Then they all went down the steep path into the valley, at the bottom of which the children were swarming in a cluster, as thick as bees, while a pale flame and a cloud of white smoke went up from the midst of them like the fire beneath a sacrifice. This indicated the boiling of the kettle, in true gipsy fashion.

For the next hour and a half tea-drinking was the all-absorbing business with everybody. The boiling of the kettle was a grand feature in the entertainment. Cups and saucers were provided by a little colony of civilised gipsies, who seem indigenous to the spot, and whose summer life is devoted to assisting at picnics and tea-drinkings, telling fortunes, and selling photographs. White cloths were spread upon the short sweet turf, and piles of bread-and-butter, cake, and buns, invited the attention of the flies.

Presently arose the thrilling melody of a choral grace, with the sweet embellishment of a strong Hampshire accent. And then, with a swoop as of eagles on their quarry, the school-children came down upon the mountains of bread-and-butter, and eat their way manfully to the buns and cake.

Violet had never been happier since her return to Hampshire than she felt this sunny afternoon, as she moved quickly about, ministering to these juvenile devourers. The sight of their somewhat bovine contentment took her thoughts away from her own cares and losses; and presently, when the banquet was concluded—

a conclusion only arrived at by the total consumption of everything provided, whereby the hungry-eyed gipsy attendants sunk into despondency—Vixen constituted herself Lord of Misrule, and led off a noisy procession in the time-honoured game of Oranges-and-Lemons, which entertainment continued till the school-children were in a high fever. After this they had Kiss-in-the-Ring; Vixen only stipulating, before she began, that nobody should presume to drop the handkerchief before her. Then came Touchwood—a game charmingly adapted to that wooded valley, where the trees looked as if they had been planted at convenient distances, on purpose for this juvenile sport.

"Oh, I am so tired," cried Violet, at last, when church clocks—all out of ear-shot in this deep valley—were striking eight, and the low sun was golden on the silvery beech-boles, and the quiet half-hidden water-pools under the trees yonder; "I really don't think I can have anything to do with the next game."

"Oh, if you please, miss," cried twenty shrill young voices, "oh, if you please, miss, we couldn't play without you—you're the best on us!"

This soothing flattery had its effect.

"Oh, but I really don't think I can do more than start you," sighed Vixen, flushed and breathless; "what is it to be?"

"Blindman's-buff," roared the boys.

"Hunt-the-Slipper," screamed the girls.

"Oh, Blindman's-buff is best," said Vixen. "This little wood is a splendid place for Blindman's-buff. But mind, I shall only start you. Now then, who's to be blind man?"

Mr. Scobel volunteered. He had been a tranquil spectator of the sports hitherto; but this was the last game, and he felt that he ought to do something more than look on. Vixen blindfolded him, asked him the usual question about his father's stable, and then sent him spinning amongst the moss-grown beeches, groping his way fearfully, with outstretched arms, amidst shrillest laughter and noisiest delight.

He was not long blindfold, and had not had many bumps against the trees, before he impounded the person of a fat and scant-of-breath scholar, a girl whose hard breathing would have betrayed her neighbourhood to the dullest ear.

"That's Polly Sims, I know," said the vicar.

It was Polly Sims, who was inconti-



nently made as blind as Fortune or Justice, or any other of the deities who dispense benefits to man. Polly floundered about among the trees for a long time, making frantic efforts to catch the empty air, panting like a human steam-engine, and nearly knocking out what small amount of brains she might possess against the grey branches, outstretched like the lean arms of Macbeth's weird women across her path. Finally Polly Sims succeeded in catching Bobby Jones, whom she clutched with the tenacity of an octopus; and then came the reign of Bobby Jones, who was an expert at the game, and who kept the whole party on the qui vive by his serpentine windings and twistings among the stout old trunks.

Presently there was a shrill yell of triumph. Bobby had caught Miss Tempest.

"I know'd her by her musling gown'd," he roared.

Violet submitted with a good grace.

"I'm dreadfully tired," she said, "and I'm sure I shan't catch anyone."

The sun had been getting lower and lower. There were splashes of golden light on the smooth grey beech-boles, and that was all. Soon these would fade, and all would be gloom. The grove had an awful look already. One would expect to meet some ghostly Druid, or some witch of eld among the shadowy tracks left by the forest wildlings. Vixen went about her work languidly. She was really tired, and was glad to think her day's labours were over. She went slowly in and out among the trees, feeling her way with outstretched arms, her feet sinking sometimes into deep drifts of last year's leaves, or gliding noiselessly over the moss. The air was soft and cool and dewy, with a perfume of nameless wild flowers—a faint aromatic odour of herbs, which the wise women had gathered for medicinal uses in days of old, when your village sorceress was your safest doctor. Everywhere there was the hush and coolness of fast-coming night. The children's voices were stilled. This last stage of the game was a thing of breathless interest.

Vixen's footsteps drifted lower down into the wooded hollow; insensibly she was coming towards the edge of the treacherously green bog, which has brought many a bold rider to grief in these districts, and still she had caught no one. She began to think that she had wandered ever so far away, and was in danger of

losing herself altogether, or at least losing everybody else, and being left by herself in the forest darkness. The grassy hollow in which she was wandering had an atmosphere of solitude.

She was on the point of taking off the handkerchief that Mr. Scobel had bound so effectually across her eyes, when her outstretched arms clasped something—a substantial figure, distinctly human, clad in rough cloth.

Before she had time to think who it was she had captured, a pair of strong arms clasped her; she was drawn to a broad chest; she felt a heart beating strong and fast against her shoulder, while lips that seemed too familiar to offend, kissed hers with all the passion of a lover's kiss.

"Don't be angry," said a well-known voice, "I believe it's the rule of the game. If it isn't I'm sure it ought to be."

A hand, at once strong and gentle, took off the handkerchief, and in the soft woodland twilight she looked up at Roderick Vawdrey's face, looking down upon her with an expression which she presumed must mean a brotherly friendliness—the delight of an old friend at seeing her after a long interval.

She was not the less angry at that outrageous unwarrantable kiss.

"It is not the rule of the game amongst civilised people; though it possibly may be among ploughboys and servant-maids!" she exclaimed indignantly. "You are really a most ungentlemanlike person! I wonder Lady Mabel Ashbourne has not taught you better manners."

"Is that to be my only reward for saving you from plunging—at least ankle-deep—in the marshy ground yonder? But for me you would have been performing a boggy version of Ophelia by this time."

"How did you come here?"

"I have been to Langley Brook for a day's fly-fishing, and was tramping home across country in a savage humour at my poor sport, when I heard the chatter of small voices, and presently came upon the Scobels and the school-children. The juveniles were in a state of alarm at having lost you. They had been playing the game in severe silence, and at a turn in the grove missed you altogether. Oh, here comes Scobel, with his trencher on the back of his head."

The vicar came forward, rejoicing at sight of Violet's white gown.

"My dear, what a turn you have given us!" he cried; "those silly children, to let

you out of their sight! I don't think a wood is a good place for Blindman's-buff."

"No more do I," answered Vixen, very pale.

"You look as if you had been frightened, too," said the vicar.

"It did feel awfully lonely; not a sound, except the frogs croaking their vespers, and one dismal owl screaming in the distance. And how cold it has turned now the sun has gone down; and how ghostly the beeches look in their green mantles; there is something awful in a wood at sunset."

She ran on in an excited tone, masking her agitation under an unnatural vivacity. Roderick watched her keenly. Mr. and Mrs. Scobel went back to their business of getting the children together, and the pots, pans, and baskets packed for the return-journey. The children were inclined to be noisy and insubordinate. They would have liked to have made a night of it in this woody hollow, or in the gorse-clothed heights up yonder by Stony Cross. To go home after such a festival, and be herded in small stuffy cottages, was doubtless trying to free-born humanity, always more or less envious of the gipsies.

"Shall we walk up the hill together?" Roderick asked humbly, "while the Scobels follow with their flock?"

"I am going to drive Mr. and Mrs. Scobel."

"But where is your carriage?"

"I don't know. I rather think it was to meet us at the top of the hill."

"Then let us go up together and find it—unless you hate me too much to endure my company for a quarter of an hour—or are too angry with me for my impertinence just now."

"It is not worth being serious about," answered Vixen quietly, after a little pause. "I was very angry at the moment, but after all—between you and me—who were like brother and sister a few years ago, it can't matter very much. I daresay you may have kissed me then."

"I think I did—once or twice," admitted Rorie with laudable gravity.

"Then let your impertinence just now go down to the old account. But," seeing him drawing nearer her with a sudden eagerness, "mind, it is never to be repeated. I could not forgive that."

"I would do much to escape your anger," said Rorie softly.

"The whole situation just now was too

ridiculous," pursued Vixen, with a spurious hilarity. "A young woman wandering blindfolded in a wood all alone—it must have seemed very absurd."

"It seemed very far from absurd—to me," said Rorie.

They were going slowly up the grassy hill, the short scanty herbage looking grey in the dimness. Glow-worms were beginning to shine here and there at the foot of the furze-bushes. A pale moon was rising above the broad expanse of wood and valley, which sank in gentle undulations into distant plains, where the young corn was growing, and the cattle were grazing in a sober agricultural district. Here all was wild and beautiful—rich, yet barren.

"I'm afraid when we met last—at Lady Southminster's ball—that I forgot to congratulate you upon your engagement to your cousin," said Violet by-and-by, when they had walked a little way in perfect silence.

She was trying to carry out an old determination. She had always meant to go up to him frankly with outstretched hand, and wish him joy. And she fancied that at the ball she had said too little. She had not let him understand that she was really glad. "Believe me, I am very glad that you should marry someone close at home—that you should widen your influence among us."

"You are very kind," answered Rorie with exceeding coldness. "I suppose all such engagements are subjects for congratulation, from a conventional point of view. My future wife is both amiable and accomplished, as you know. I have reason to be very proud that she has done me so great an honour as to prefer me to many worthier suitors; but I am bound to tell you—as we once before spoke of this subject, at the time of your dear father's death, and I then expressed myself somewhat strongly—I am bound to tell you that my engagement to Mabel was made to please my poor mother. It was when we were all in Italy together. My mother was dying, and Mabel's goodness and devotion to her had been beyond all praise; and my heart was drawn to her by affection, by gratitude; and I knew that it would make my poor mother happy to see us irrevocably bound to each other—and so—the thing came about somehow, almost unawares, and I have every reason to be proud and happy that fate should have favoured me so far above my deserts."

"I am very glad that you are happy," said Violet gently.

After this there was a silence which lasted longer than the previous interval in their talk. They were at the top of the hill before either of them spoke.

Then Vixen laid her hand lightly upon her old playfellow's arm, and said, with extreme earnestness:

"You will go into Parliament by-and-by, no doubt, and have great influence. Do not let them spoil the Forest. Do not let horrid grinding-down economists, for the sake of saving a few pounds or gaining a few pounds, alter and destroy scenes that are so beautiful and a delight to so many. Let all things be as they were when we were children."

"All that my voice and influence can do to keep them so shall be done, Violet," he answered in tones as earnest. "I am glad that you have asked me something to-night. I am glad, with all my heart, that you have given me something to do for you. It shall be like a badge in my helmet, by-and-by, when I enter the lists. I think I shall say: 'For God and for Violet,' when I run a tilt against the economic devastators who want to clear our woods and cut off our commoners."

He bent down and kissed her hand, as in token of knightly allegiance. He had just time to do it comfortably before Mr. and Mrs. Scobel, with the children and their master and mistress, came marching up the hill, singing, with shrill glad voices, one of the harvest-home processional hymns.

All good gifts around us  
Are sent from heaven above,  
Then thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord,  
For all His love.

"What a lovely night!" cried Mr. Scobel. "I think we ought all to walk home. It would be much nicer than being driven."

This he said with a lively recollection of Titmouse's performances on the journey out, and a lurking dread that he might behave a little worse on the journey home. A lively animal of that kind, going home to his stable, through the uncertain lights and shadows of woodland roads, and driven by such a charioteer as Violet Tempest, was not to be thought of without a shudder.

"I think I had better walk home, in any case," said Mr. Scobel thoughtfully. "I shall be wanted to keep the children together."

"Let us all walk home," suggested

Roderick. "We can go through the plantations. It will be very jolly in the moonlight. Bates can drive your pony back, Violet."

Vixen hesitated.

"It's not more than four miles through the plantations," said Roderick.

"Do you think I am afraid of a long walk?"

"Of course not. You were a modern Atalanta three years ago. I don't suppose a winter in Paris and a season at Brighton have quite spoiled you."

"It shall be as you like, Mrs. Scobel," said Vixen, appealing to the vicar's wife.

"Oh, let us walk by all means," replied Mrs. Scobel, divining her husband's feelings with respect to Titmouse.

"Then you may drive the pony home, Bates," said Violet; "and be sure you give him a good supper."

Titmouse went rattling down the hill at a pace that almost justified the vicar's objection to him. He gave a desperate shy in the hollow at sight of a shaggy donkey, with a swollen appearance about the head, suggestive, to the equine mind, of hobgoblins. Convulsed at this appalling spectre, Titmouse stood on end for a second or two, and then tore violently off, swinging his carriage behind him, so that the groom's figure swayed to and fro in the moonlight.

"Thank God we're not sitting behind that brute!" ejaculated the vicar devoutly.

The pedestrians went off in the other direction, along the brow of the hill, by a long white road that crossed a wide sweep of heathy country, brown ridges and dark hollows, distant groups of firs standing black against the moonlit sky, here and there a solitary yew, that looked as if it were haunted—just such a landscape as that Scottish heath upon which Macbeth met the three weird women at set of sun, when the battle was lost and won. Vixen and Rorie led the way; the procession of school-children followed, singing hymns as they went with a vocal power that gave no token of diminution.

"Their singing is very melodious when the sharp edge is taken off by distance," said Rorie, and he and Violet walked at a pace which soon left the children a good way behind them. Mellowed by a quarter of a mile or so of intervening space, the music lent a charm to the tranquil, perfumed night.

By-and-by they came to the gate of



an enclosure which covered a large extent of ground, and through which there was a near way to Beechdale and the Abbey House. They walked along a grassy track through a plantation of young pines—a track which led them down into a green and mossy bottom, where the trees were old and beautiful, and the shadows fell darker. The tall beech branches shone like silver, or like wonderful frozen trees in some region of eternal ice and snow. It was a wilderness in which a stranger would incontinently lose himself; but every foot of the way was familiar to Vixen and Rorie. They had followed the hounds by these green ways, and ridden and walked here in all seasons.

For some time they walked almost in silence, enjoying the beauty of the night, the stillness only broken by the distant chorus of children singing their pious strains—old hymn-tunes that Violet had known and loved all her life.

"Doesn't it almost seem as if our old childish days had come back?" said Roderick by-and-by. "Don't you feel as if you were a little girl again, Vixen, going for a ramble with me—fern-hunting or primrose-gathering?"

"No," answered Vixen firmly. "Nothing can ever bring the past back, for me. I shall never forget that I had a father—the best and dearest, and that I have lost him."

"Dear Violet," Roderick began, very gently, "life cannot be made up of mourning for the dead. We may keep their images enshrined in our hearts for ever, but we must not shut our youth from the sunshine. Think how few years of youth God gives us; and if we waste those upon vain sorrow——"

"No one can say that I have wasted my youth, or shut myself from the sunshine. I go to kettledrums and dancing-parties. My mother and I have taken pains to let the world see how happy we can be without papa."

"The dear old squire," said Rorie, tenderly; "I think he loved me."

"I am sure he did," answered Vixen.

"Well, you and I seem to have entered upon a new life since last we rode through these woods together. I daresay you are right, and that it is not possible to fancy oneself back in the past, even for a moment. Consciousness of the present hangs so heavily upon us."

"Yes," assented Vixen.

They had come to the end of the en-

closure, and stood leaning against a gate, waiting for the arrival of the children.

"And after all, perhaps, it is better to live in the present, and look back at the past, as at an old picture which we shall sooner or later turn with its face to the wall."

"I like best to think of my old self as if it were someone else," said Violet. "I know there was a little girl whom her father called Vixen, who used to ride after the hounds, and roam about the Forest on her pony; and who was almost as wild as the Forest ponies herself. But I can't associate her with this present me," concluded Violet, pointing to herself with a half-scornful gesture.

"And which is the better, do you think," asked Rorie; "the wild Violet of the past, or the elegant exotic of the present?"

"I know which was the happier."

"Ah," sighed Rorie, "happiness is a habit we outgrow when we get out of our teens. But you, at nineteen, ought to have a year or so to the good."

The children came in sight, tramping along the rutty green walk, singing lustily, Mr. Scobel walking at their head, and swinging his stick in time with the tuneful choir.

#### TOWN-BRED POETS.

THE landscape school of poetry—that which delights in celebrating the charms, the glories, and the sublimities of rural scenery, of the sea, of the mountain, of the forest, of the meadow, and of the garden, of the beauty and freshness of the flowers, and of the music of the groves—is almost peculiar to the British Isles. The ancient Greeks and Romans did not excel in, and scarcely cultivated, this branch of the poetic art. Their poets delighted in describing the actions of men and women, and in the portrayal of the emotions and passions, the loves, the hatreds, the joys and sorrows of the human heart; being of the opinion expressed by Alexander Pope in a later day that "The proper study of mankind is man," or, as a cynic might say, "the hardest study." The Italian, French, Spanish, and German poets display more of the antique than the modern spirit in this respect, and draw but few of their illustrations from what is erroneously called "inanimate nature." The French poet Beranger, for instance, never saw or

cared to see a mountain or the ocean, and was quite content to draw such little rural knowledge as he possessed from the trees and the gardens of the Tuileries, or St. Cloud, or the Champs Elysées of his beloved Paris. The poets who write in the English language have different ideas, and without neglecting the dramatic and historic sources of inspiration, indulge more frequently than those of any other nation in the descriptive, the picturesque, and the reflective, or what may be called the landscape department of their art. They are, for the most part, lyrical rather than heroic; and were it not for the roses and the lilies, and the ever-varying beauties or grandeurs of nature in her gentlest or wildest moods, would run the risk of starving the Muse for want of her accustomed sustenance.

But our landscape poets bred in towns do not always imitate the conscientious example of the landscape painters, who are the glory of the English school. They too often make mistakes as egregious as would be those of a painter, who should introduce into the same picture the bare oak branches of January with the roses of June and the ripe grapes of October. This mistake is constantly made by versifiers, who take nature at secondhand, and do not use their own eyes for the purpose of seeing, but repeat, in parrot fashion, what has been said before, however incorrect it may be. Sir Walter Scott set a praiseworthy example. He took observations of nature on the spot; and if he wished to describe a landscape, noted what he saw, and nothing more. He never introduced the snowdrop at midsummer, nor the ripe peach in April.

Shakespeare himself may be now and then caught tripping in this respect. "See," says Leigh Hunt in his Indicator, "what a noble brief portrait of April Shakespeare gives us:

"Proud pied April, dressed in all his trim.

Nor did I wonder at the lilies white,  
Nor praise the deep vermillion in the rose;  
They were but sweet, but patterns of delight,  
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those."

"Shakespeare," adds his critic, "was fond of alluding to April. He did not allow May to have all his regard because she was richer." But if the rose in the "deep vermillion" of her beauty flourished in April in the days of Shakespeare, there has either been a change in the rose or in the seasons, or Shakespeare drew upon his imagination for a supposed fact, which

would not bear the ordeal of cross-examination. Again, he speaks in the song, elegantly set to music by Dr. Arne, commencing, "When daisies pied and violets blue," of a white flower which he calls the lady's smock, which he describes as in 'full bloom at the time of the cuckoo. What is now called the lady's smock is the beautiful wild white convolvulus, which clambers over our English hedges in September, months after the cuckoo has taken her final departure from our shores. But perhaps Shakespeare had some other flower in his mind, which was known in his time by the name of the lady's smock. In Mr. Thomas Wright's Archaic and Provincial Dictionary of the English Language, the lady's smock is described as the great bindweed or convolvulus, while Mr. Halliwell calls it Canterbury bells. But Canterbury bells are usually blue, and do not belong to the class of meadow flowers which Shakespeare desired to celebrate. Possibly, Shakespeare's remembrances of country life in the neighbourhood of Stratford-upon-Avon or the old Forest of Arden may, when he wrote, have been somewhat dimmed and blurred by his town life in the purlieus of the Globe Theatre and Southwark.

Drayton, another poet of the Shakespearean era, has also made allusion to the lady's smock. He says:

This maiden, in a morn betime,  
Went forth when May was in the prime  
To get sweet setywall,  
The honeysuckle, the harlock,  
The lily and the lady-smock,  
To deck her summer hall.

In this passage setywall is the common wild valerian of the fields. The lily of May is the little flower known as the lily of the valley, which flourishes in this month. But if the lady's smock be the great white convolvulus, he brings it into his poem, as Shakespeare did, about three months before its proper time.

William Strode—who wrote a beautiful poem, *In Praise of Melancholy*, which seems to have given Milton the first idea of his *Il Penseroso*—was so little acquainted with country life, as to have considered that the bat was a bird. He talks of:

Places which pale passion loves,  
Moonlight walks when all the fowls  
Are warmly housed save bats and owls.

But of all the town-bred poets—if poet he can be truly called—the greatest offender against the truths of natural history

is Isaac Watts, the celebrated author of *Divine and Moral Songs*, who has for several generations been known to the young mothers, as well as to the nurses and young children, of England. In one of his celebrated ditties, called *The Ant or Emmet*, wherein he inculcates lessons of thrift and foresight, he says of these remarkable little creatures—so well studied in our day by Sir John Lubbock—that “they wear not their time out in sleeping or play.” Watts did not know that, in common with bees, flies, and countless other insects, the ants hibernate or sleep all the winter; neither did he know, when he affirmed that “they gathered up corn on a sunshiny day, and laid up a store for the winter,” that what he considered to be grains of corn, were no other than their pupæ, or young, which, with maternal and paternal solicitude, they carried to places of safety whenever their nests were disturbed by the rude hands of too inquisitive man. He adds:

They manage their work in such regular forms,  
One would think they foresaw all the frosts and the  
storms,  
And so brought their food within doors.

A little observation of the nature he attempted to describe would have saved Dr. Watts from these errors, and prevented him from going so ingeniously wrong. Nor is the good doctor (a thorough Cockney) more correct when he speaks of the gentle, faithful animals, dogs, “as foul and fierce in their nature;” and when he asserts that “birds in their little nests agree,” he evidently thought, not only that birds lived habitually in their nests—which they don’t, the nest being chiefly used for the purpose of incubation, and deserted as soon as that grand maternal process is completed—but also that birds, in their nest and out of it, never quarrelled. The fact is that birds are about as quarrelsome as men—as everyone who has studied their habits can testify; whether the birds be the domestic fowl, or the turkey, or the swan, or even the cantankerous and most pugnacious little blackguard, the sparrow, the very pariah of the feathered creation.

Robert Burns, in whose poetry no traces of such inaccuracies are to be found, and who attentively observed and faithfully described all the natural appearances amid which his life was passed, says in a letter to George Thomson: “The Banks of the Dee, you know, is literally *Langolee* to slow time. The

song is well enough, but has some false imagery in it, for instance:

“And sweetly the nightingale sang from the tree.

In the first place, the nightingale sings from a low bush, never from a tree; and in the second place, there never was a nightingale seen or heard on the banks of the Dee, or any other river in Scotland.”

Yet Scottish poets of inferior note constantly speak of the nightingale—as do some of the modern American versifiers, who re-echo the blemishes as well as the beauties of English song, though neither nightingale nor lark was ever heard on the American continent. Even Mr. Longfellow, who is wiser in this respect than many of his countrymen, speaks of “swallows singing down each wind that blows.” Swallows may twitter or chirp, but they cannot sing any more than a sparrow.

Coleridge, who lived long enough in town to forget the country, says in his beautiful poem of *Christabel*:

’Tis a month before the month of May,  
The night is chill, the forest bare,  
There is not wind enough to twirl  
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,  
Hanging so light and hanging so high  
On the topmost twig that looks up to the sky.

“A month before the month of May” is clearly the month of April, at which time the forest is no longer “bare,” as the poet describes, but has put forth either the tender green leaflets of the spring, or the early buds, which have pushed away all the verdure of the previous year, and left no red leaf of the long past autumn to tremble in the breeze.

Dr. Blacklock, of Edinburgh, one of the early friends of Burns, and who was conspicuously instrumental in bringing the genius of that great and unfortunate poet to the notice of the literary and aristocratic society of the Scottish capital—a man who could judge of poetry much better than he could write it, a by no means uncommon case—was the author of a once much admired song entitled *Absence*. In this composition he says:

Ye harvests that wave in the breeze  
As far as the view can extend,  
Ye mountains umbrageous with trees,  
Whose tops so majestic ascend,  
Ye landscape what joy to survey,  
Were Marg’ret with me to admire,  
Then the harvest would glitter, how gay!  
How majestic the mountains aspire!

This poor gentleman was blind, or possibly he would have thought twice before he celebrated the “umbrageous trees” of the



aspiring mountains of Scotland. His blindness must be pleaded in excuse for his incorrectness as a word-painter; but a very town-bred poet, the late Thomas Haynes Bailey, the author of many hundreds of mediocre songs—very popular in their day—had, at all events, his eyesight, and could not, like Dr. Blacklock, urge in extenuation of his inaccuracies that he could not see. One of his songs, that took the unripe fancy of our grandfathers and grandmothers in the days when they were young and foolish, expressed his desire to be a butterfly:

I'd be a butterfly, born in a bower  
Where roses and lilies and violets meet.

But butterflies are not born in bowers, whether roses and lilies meet there or not; for truth compels the admission that they are born in cabbages, and that in their youthful state as caterpillars—before they have attained to the dignity of wings—they commit very serious depredations on those useful vegetables, as every gardener knows to his sorrow. Nor is the poet, if a poet he be, which is doubtful, more correct when he says that the butterfly

Sportive and airy,  
Sleeps in a rose when the nightingale sings.

Butterflies do not sleep in roses, in the petals of any other flower, or in other unsheltered places, but take refuge in nooks and crannies, instinctively afraid of the nightingale, who would be very likely to make a meal of them if they came within his sphere of vision.

There was a time in the history of poetry when unreality was its distinguishing characteristic, and when French and English writers vied with each other in producing lyrics that had no touch of nature about them, and when all lovers were made to masquerade as shepherds and shepherdesses, of a kind that have never been seen except on the stage and in the pictures of Watteau. Chloe, Phyllis, or Amanda was always represented with short petticoats, silk stockings, high-heeled shoes—with ribbons on them, with a brocade tunic of green, sky-blue, crimson, or innocent white, holding a crook garlanded with flowers; while Corydon, Lubin, or Aminto kept her company in a similar costume, though with nether garments of satin or velvet, casting glances now and then at the sheep, which had ribbons round their necks like ladies' lap-dogs, but devoting the greater part of their attention to themselves, as

was proper to people in love. Out of a thousand or even ten thousand specimens of this kind of literature with which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were inundated, the following brick may serve to show of what the temple was constructed. It is the composition of Gilbert Elliott, first Earl of Minto, and dates from the year 1740:

My sheep I neglected—I lost my sheep-hook,  
And all the gay haunts of my youth I forsook;  
No more for Augusta fresh garlands I wove;  
For ambition, I said, would soon cure me of love.  
Oh, what had my youth with ambition to do?  
Why left I Augusta? why broke I my vow?  
Oh, give me my sheep, and my sheep-hook restore,  
And I'll wander from love and Augusta no more.

A quarter of a century before this rubbish made its appearance, Alexander Pope—a true poet, though not of the very highest rank of the immortals, like Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, or Shelley—shot a bolt of much-needed satire against the too-prevalent inanities which a silly age persisted in recognising as poetry. The whole composition is too long to quote; but a couple of stanzas will suffice to show its spirit and its sting:

Mild Arcadians, ever blooming,  
Nightly nodding o'er your flocks,  
See my weary days consuming  
All beneath yon flowery rocks.  
Thus when Philomela, drooping,  
Softly seeks her silent mate,  
See the birds of Juno stooping,  
Melody resigns to Fate!

The shaft was well aimed; but stupidity has a long life, and it was not until the publication of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, and the rise of the school of natural poetry, of which Wordsworth was the chief apostle and bard, at the end of the eighteenth, and beginning of the nineteenth century, that the vast army of the versifiers began to be even dimly aware of the fact that nonsense does not cease to be nonsense merely because it is written in rhythm and rhyme, or because it masquerades under the guise of poetry. This particular delusion is not yet wholly dispelled, or the "Poet's Corner" of provincial newspapers would not continue to be so constantly filled, and such countless volumes of rhymed trash would not be annually published at the expense of their authors. The truest poets are always the most correct. Nothing is too great, and nothing is too small, for their observation. Their genius, as has been said of the elephant's trunk, can pick up the pin as well as rend the oak. "They ransack the

broad heavens for new illustrations, or turn over the minutest pebble in the sand for new facts. Nothing escapes them. Everything becomes tributary to their genius." But in all their airy flights between the real and the ideal, their imagination is always true to the laws of imagination—laws that are subservient to those of nature, and which do not permit the poet to outrage truth by the creation of unreal monstrosities, or denials of palpable and universally recognised facts. Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well, in poetry as in everything else; and before the town poet attempts to describe rural nature, he ought to study it in all its details. And, in like manner, the poet who has lived all his life among forests, or in the valleys of the mountain slopes, should know something of the life of cities, and the fermentation of human life in multitudes, before he begins to trace the lines of heroic or dramatic composition. Nature herself is an artist, and if the poet be not one he has mistaken his vocation.

## MIDDLE AGE.

ALL over; aye, I look at mine own hand,  
That quite has lost the lissom grace of youth,  
But if its living pulse I understand,  
Fit yet to hold its own for love or truth;  
Scarce meet for pretty pledge or kiss of lover,  
Yet fond and firm for clasping in another.

Over and done; I sit before the glass,  
Drawn full into the sunshine's ruthless glare,  
I see the crow'sfoot where the soft bloom was,  
The silver threads set in the bright brown hair;  
My mirror never flashed me beauty back,  
So now, perchance, I have the less to lack.

And yet for all it's over, in the face,  
That gazes sad and patient back on me,  
I fancy love might read some quiet grace,  
Some touch of matron calm serenity.  
The eyes that live on children's life for years,  
Gain something surely from their smiles and tears.

Must it be over? one by one they flash,  
To their own place, these cherished stars of ours,  
Daring the storm in courage blind and rash,  
Seeing no serpent coiled among the flowers;  
Leaving us stranded on the lonely shore,  
Where the long waves chant, "Never, never more."

They will not, may not, cannot come again;  
The bond is snapped, and the great current sweeping  
Each little boat on to the mighty main,  
Over each barrier in its fury leaping,  
Bears them in its resistless might along,  
For wreck or haven, gain, loss, prize, or wrong.

For us, it all is over; though sometimes,  
We feel old power pulse our being yet.  
"Past, past!" the voice of fate around us chimes,  
Past, aim and dream, vain struggle, or regret!  
Put by the mirror, let the hand alone,  
The last card has been dealt, the game is done.

## CHRISTMAS LITERATURE.

It is curious how one's views alter as time rolls on. There is Dick Copprelesse, now, who came, in most strikingly unexpected fashion, last spring into all his grandfather's property. I remember well how, at the time the succession duty was first proposed, Dick came all the way to my chambers expressly to borrow a couple of pounds to qualify himself to vote as a "forty-shilling freeholder" for the inventor of that admirable impost. It was only last week he informed me he was going to join the Afghan Committee, and when I asked him why: "That vagabond Dizzy!" he broke out. "Two thousand pounds, sir, for his infernal succession duty! I'll never forgive him—never!" I have not seen any cause to alter my own views on that particular subject. I wish I had. But there are points on which my opinions have undergone almost as decided a modification. And Christmas is one of them. I remember when boxing-day was the great festival of the year. It does not appear to me in that light now by any means. And yet my position is in some respects not so much changed. I was one of six then. I am one of six now. Only then I was the youngest of the six, now I am the eldest—very much the eldest; as the other five painfully remind me when the Christmas bills come in.

However, needs must when the—when the "festive season" comes round. Another week, and Charlie and Cis and little Tommy will be clamouring for their Christmas-boxes, much as, I am afraid, I used to clamour, never mind how many years ago. Edith will not clamour, of course. She has grown much too stately a young person for that. But she will push back her fringe, and make big eyes as she wishes me "A merry Christmas, papa!" and I know what that means just as well as she does. So I may as well make up my mind for it at once, and see what the publishers have done for us in this year of grace, 1878.

And a terrible sight it is.

Facile princes in the gorgeous array comes Messrs. Bickers' gigantic volume on Switzerland, with its four hundred and eighteen for the most part admirably executed engravings, by a score and more of different artists, and its five hundred glossy pages of descriptive letterpress, by Herr Woldemar Raden. Seasonable chiefly from its splendour, no doubt. The con-

nection between Christmas and Switzerland, if you come to think of it, is, on the whole, distinctly of the *lucus a non lucendo* character. But, then, why should one come to think of it? As the plaintive critic said after a classical "first night:" "It is so easy not to write five-act tragedies in blank verse;" and there is really something very like pure perverseness in objecting to having our dear old lakes and mountains and glaciers and waterfalls brought to us at Christmas-time, merely because it doesn't happen to be summer, and so we can't go to them. And if we are to be once more personally conducted from Geneva to the Bodensee, and from the Jura to the very verge of the Italian lakes, without the trouble of stirring from our own comfortable Christmas fireside, it would be difficult to put ourselves into better hands than those of Herr Raden and his quarter of a century of artistic coadjutors.

We make our start, after a little preliminary trifling with "Alpine roads and passes," in their more general aspect, with the Lake of Constance, working our way by "the realm of the Sântis"—by which somewhat fantastic title our author intends the cantons of Appenzell and St. Gallen—the Lakes of Wallenstadt and Zurich, the Forest Cantons, the mountains of Uri and Unterwalden, to Lucerne and the inevitable Rigi. Thence leaping back to Basle, we work our way through the Bernese Oberland and its dependencies to the Western Lakes.

Then from Geneva to Chamounix and the Mer de Glace, over the Tête Noire to the Valais, and so—darting off every now and then up the Gemmi or the Great St. Bernard, or away to Zermatt or Leuk, or through the picturesque windings of the Simplon—away through the long Rhone Valley and over the Furka and the Ober Alp, we zigzag our way by the Splügen and the St. Gothard and the Italian cantons to the Engadine, and so finally back to our starting-point in the far east. A line of route, by-the-way, to be followed more or less with advantage, not only on paper at Christmas-time, but in the more practical operations of the summer, if for no other reason than that it enables you altogether to avoid that most detestable of all railways, the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée.

The precise road taken by Herr Raden would perhaps be a little complicated for the summer tourist; but it has the advan-

tage of pretty thoroughly exhausting the subject, and of this advantage Herr Raden and his coadjutors have conscientiously availed themselves. There were great men besides Agamemnon, of course, and there are, no doubt, more than four hundred and eighteen picturesque views in Switzerland; but he will be a tourist of tenacious mind who shall carry away a better general memento of, let us say, a three months' pilgrimage than is supplied him in the gorgeous crimson and gold volume Messrs. Bickers and Co. offer him as a Christmas-box.

Among the best of the pictures, whether for the beauty of the scene itself, or the skill with which it is portrayed, are, perhaps, the group of Siberian pines in the opening part, a curious wild sketch of a Lacustrine village, a delicious old bridge at Lauffenburg, a very spirited fancy scene of chamois overtaken by an avalanche, a good bold sketch of the Handeck, where the effect of the falling water, though not quite perfect, is more nearly so than mere black and white often succeeds in rendering it, and two charming interiors, one from the castle of Wülflingen near Winterthur, the other from Winkelried's house at Stanz.

Then, if the Christmas traveller wishes to go yet farther afield, he can go under the auspices of the same enterprising firm right away out of winter altogether, and see what Christmas is like down among the sunny summer islands of the southern seas. Captain Cook's Voyages, by Dr. A. Kippis, with illustrations reproduced in exact fac-simile from the original drawings, ought to be a book after an English boy's own heart. Exactly a century ago this year, Captain Cook was spending his last Christmas off the coast of Owhyhee—or Hawaii, as we are now careful to call that pleasantest of wintering places—dining off salmon-pie instead of turkey and plum-pudding, and purchasing King Kamehameha's magnificent feather-embroidered robe of state—Ka-mea-mea Dr. Kippis calls him, by-the-way—for "nine iron daggers." In two months more the great discoverer's voyages had come to an end, and he was lying murdered on the shore of Kernegooah Bay, stabbed in the back by one of those very daggers he himself had put into the treacherous hands of his Hawaiian hosts.

Three times round about the world good Dr. Kippis takes us—or rather, to be accurate, twice and a half, the



worthy narrator's own account stopping short with the death of his hero, and leaving the remainder of the voyage to be finished in an appendix. A charmingly quaint old style is the doctor's, and quite worthy of the story he has to tell. I don't think poor Artemus Ward himself could have better recorded, for instance, the taking possession of Queen Charlotte's Sound. The explorer, having prepared his flagstaff, goes first to a neighbouring "hippah"—or "pah," as the more modern Maori hath it—where he meets with an old man who has maintained a friendly intercourse with the English. "To this old man, and several Indians besides, the lieutenant explained his design, which was to erect a mark upon the island, in order to show to any other ship which should come thither that our navigators had been there before. To this they readily assented, promising never to pull it down. He then gave something to everyone present; and to the old man a silver threepence, and some spike nails with the king's broad arrow cut deep upon them. After this he conveyed the post to the highest part of the island, and having fixed it firmly in the ground, hoisted upon it the union flag, and honoured the inlet with the name of Queen Charlotte's Sound. At the same time he took formal possession of this and the adjacent country in the name and for the use of his majesty King George the Third. The ceremony was concluded by the gentlemen's drinking a bottle of wine to her majesty's health; and the bottle being given to the old man, he was highly delighted with his present." Dear old man!

Mr. Warne heads his list of books with another good old tale of stirring adventure; hardly so authentic, perhaps, but what does that matter at Christmas-time? It is not quite a hundred years since the great Baron Munchausen first made his bow to an English public; but he has run through a good many editions since 1786, and in his present guise is not unlikely to run through a good many more. Monsieur Richiard's illustrations of the adventurous traveller's career would not be unworthy of Gustave Doré himself, and must surely carry conviction to the most sceptical mind. If any juvenile representative of what the irate preacher once stigmatised as "this so-called nineteenth century" should doubt, for instance, the feasibility of lifting yourself out of a pond by your own pigtail, let him turn to the picture

opposite page eighty-nine, and he will see at once what a simple and effective operation it is. If he still remain unconvinced, the only stronger proof I can suggest is to try the experiment in his own person. But perhaps he had better wait for that till the ponds are warmer.

As for the adventurous baron's reconnoitring ride through the air upon a cannon-ball, no one who has once seen M. Richiard's spirited sketch of that delightful journey can ever again doubt as to the one only use to which Krupps, and Rodmans, and Woolwich Infants, and the like, should ever be applied. I am afraid there are some kings and emperors among us who are "ower auld to learn;" but every little prince and princess, and, above all, every possible future premier, foreign secretary, or member of parliament, ought to be provided with a copy forthwith. From an artistic point of view, perhaps, the best picture in the book is that wherein the baron is depicted thrusting his arm down the wolf's throat, for the purpose of turning him inside out. The wintry forest, with its dull-red setting sun, and ghostly grey firs standing stiffly up under their burthen of snow, is rendered in a few broad touches with admirable effect.

From the baron to our no less familiar and no less valued old friends, the Swiss Family Robinson, is a short step, and I think I may say a merry one. Why are there no such islands nowadays? Why cannot we go and get wrecked among the monkeys and tigers, the lions and elephants, the tapirs and bears, the ortolans and flamingoes, the ostriches and seals, and all the rest of the happy family? Since I last risked a caning by poring over the dear old volume at unhallowed hours by the carefully-shaded light of an unlawfully "conveyed" candle-end, I have had personal experience of a good many "desolate islands"—to say nothing of shipwrecks—and, as a rule, I have found them disappointing. But as I take the book up once more, I begin to feel the old adventurous spirit stir again, and have desperate notions of running away to sea upon the offchance of getting wrecked, when Mr. Plimsoll's attention shall, perchance, have been called off in some other direction.

As this tempting proceeding, however, might perhaps be inconvenient to my wife and family, I hasten to lay aside this too fascinating volume before the Berserker impulse grows too strong, and turn to the next book that comes to hand. But,

after all, I do not find *Left to Themselves* much safer reading than the *Swiss Family Robinson*. It is some five-and-twenty years or more since I was left to myself in an Australian bush, and I am bound to admit that, after the first day or two, the constantly-recurring absence of breakfast and dinner becomes, to say the least, monotonous. But Miss Marryatt's story of juvenile adventures in the bush almost deludes one into the belief that memory must be mistaken, and that losing all one's money and emigrating to the Antipodes must really be capital fun after all.

Mr. Engelbach's story, *The Danes in England*, which is the next that comes to hand, takes us back to the real old Berserker times. And a capital story it is—full of life and spirit, and with a thoroughly good tone about it. By which I do not mean "goody-goody." Quite otherwise. A real hearty, healthy story-book, with a sniff of the salt sea-breeze in it, to boot. Equally healthy, too, though for more juvenile students of, let us say, six or seven years old, is Miss Brockman's *Worth Doing*. Capital company are Master "Chump," and Master "Duff," and young Master "Cockey," and all the rest of them; and if they do talk and act like schoolboys instead of like pattern young gentlemen, why, on the whole, perhaps schoolboys will not like them much the worse, or profit by the liking much the less for it.

The moral tendency, perhaps, on the other hand, of the two pleasantly-told stories, *Englefield House*, and *Straight Paths and Crooked Ways* is rather more pronounced. If you will not be scandalised, I don't mind confiding to you, in the strictest confidence, that from my youth up until now, I have always had a decided objection to "moral stories," and have resented their administration in the form of a Christmas-box as a distinct fraud upon that festive institution. Mrs. Paull's stories, however, are not moral stories in this obnoxious sense of the word. They are only stories with a moral, or, perhaps, I should say, with several morals; and as none of those morals are ever allowed to make themselves in the least obtrusive, I don't know that, after all, one can ask for much more. And so we come in due course to the baby books. Aunt Louisa's *Favourite Toy Book*, with its gorgeously-coloured pictures of the various incidents in the never-failing histories of *Cinderella* and *Little Red Riding-hood*, *Old Mother Hubbard* and *Little Bopeep*, and the same beneficent relative's

*Golden Gift*, a real baby-book de luxe, with its prettily drawn and prettily coloured pictures, printed on a solid golden ground, like mediæval saints. I must protest, however, against the wanton carelessness of the artist who took the portrait of *Little Dame Crump*. That fortunate young matron is much too pretty to be brought before the public without her wedding-ring. I am a married man myself, so, of course, beyond the reach of temptation; but it is very hard upon inflammatory bachelors. As for *little Lavender Blue*, I quite own to being in love with him. A more perfect little gentleman surely never made love before even in a picture.

Messrs. Ward and Lock seem to cater exclusively for the little ones, but their three pretty little volumes, *Chats about Animals*, *Chats about Birds*, and the *Children's Picture Annual*, are admirably illustrated with engravings which would do no discredit to works of a much more ambitious character.

Messrs. Dean and Son, on the other hand, appear to go in chiefly for eccentricities in the way of illustration. Here, for instance, is *The New Puss in Boots*, with all the pictures clustered in the middle of the volume, and all cut transversely into three equal slices. This ingenious device enables the dramatis personæ, by the simple process of turning over one or other portion, and leaving the rest untouched, to change not only their coats and nether garments, but their very heads themselves. The Miller's Son, whom puss is in the first scene endowing with the somewhat unauthentic title of the Marquis of Carabas, has only to turn over the mere third of a new leaf, to become the very king himself, crown and all. En revanche, a couple more turns converts him into an ogre; whilst the ladies of the court think nothing of donning the propriâ quæ maribus, or the queen of accepting the attentions of puss in topboots suspiciously like his own. In the "panoramic" version of the *Queen of Hearts*, *Johnny Gilpin*, *Poor Cock Robin*, and so forth, the same principle is applied in somewhat different fashion; while in the little book of *Living Nursery Rhyme*, a new and ingenious device is employed with really dramatic effect. "The maid was in the garden," the legend tells us, "hanging out the clothes; down came a blackbird and picked off her nose." And down at the critical moment the blackbird pounces, just as, in another artfully constructed picture, the cow actually

performs her famous feat of super-lunar saltation, or the mouse runs up the clock-case and down again as the solemn bell tolls one. When I was a little boy, and every year said—or was supposed to say—"Do, papa, buy me Peter Parley's Annual," I should have clamoured vigorously for one of these "dodgy" little books. And when I had pulled it to pieces, to see how it was done you know, I should have clamoured vigorously for another.

Messrs. Kegan, Paul and Co. appeal to the more serious-minded among our juveniles. Mr. Thurston's History of the Steam Engine is just the sort of book to delight a boy of a mechanical turn, and is not without interest even for children, thus disposed, of a larger growth. I wonder, by-the-way, how many people there are who would be other than "surprised to learn" that there was a regular steam launch on the "Collect Pond," in New York, just eighty-two years ago. There is its portrait, however, at page two hundred and forty, and a very remarkable little craft she seems to have been. Mr. Rodwell's Etna, too, an elaborate and learned disquisition, which, as its author informs us, took its rise from a discovery on his part, whilst engaged upon an article for the Encyclopædia Britannica, that there was actually no existing English work upon the subject, is a capital book for any lad that way disposed; whilst the Canterbury Chimes is an attempt to bring within the reach of children no less a story-teller than the great father of English literature himself. Translated into modern prose, and pruned to the requirements of modern propriety, the Canterbury Tales in their new guise lose, perhaps, a little of their original raciness; but the adapters have taken old Izaak Walton's advice, and handled their victim as tenderly as they could, and the illustrations, taken from the Ellesmere MS., are very good.

Messrs. Rivington have only two quiet little volumes; one a brief juvenile biography of the Duke of Wellington, with a roughly executed but effective portrait from the picture by Sir Thomas Laurence in the Royal Academy of 1826, and a considerable number of maps, plans of towns, battles, &c., the other, a small quarto selection from the never dying *Pensées de Pascal*, translated by H. L. Sydney, and handsomely printed on thick old-fashioned paper, with the broad margin in which bibliomaniacs delight; while Messrs.

Cassell appear to have expended their energies on a single volume, entitled, *Pleasant Spots Round Oxford*, by Alfred Rimmer, author of *Ancient Streets and Homesteads*, &c. On the whole, I am inclined to think that if Mr. Rimmer could manage to apply a pair of mental glove-stretchers to his sympathetic faculty he would perhaps get a more comprehensive grasp of his subject. I think someone has already remarked upon the difficulty of adapting round men to square holes. But the "Oxford" hole, if it can be fitly described as of any shape at all, is distinctly pantagonal; while Mr. Rimmer, I am afraid, is, on his sympathetic side, no less distinctly monogonic. Still, the book is interesting, and the illustrations excellent; altogether a capital Christmas-box for the son and heir of a married "fellow," or for a young gentleman going up for an "exam."

Messrs. Routledge, on the other hand, have celebrated the Christmas rites with a perfect furor of devotion. If all our hairs were children, their enterprise would find Christmas-boxes for them all. And for children of all ages too; as indeed, under such circumstances, they probably would be. Here we have a batch of poetry for the grown-up ones, well on their way towards the time when they will cease to be boxees, and become boxers on their own accounts. A handsome little quarto of Will Carleton's *Farm Ballads*, beautifully printed on thick glossy paper and with manifold illustrations, some of them very good. Homely verses for so rich a dress, yet not without quaintness or without vigour either. There is a good deal of love poetry, for instance, which won't beat this:

If you to me be cold,  
Or I be false to you,  
The world will go on, I think,  
Just as it used to do;  
The clouds will flirt with the moon,  
The sun will kiss the sea,  
The wind to the trees will whisper  
And laugh at you and me.  
But the sun will not shine so bright,  
The clouds will not seem so white,  
To one as they will to two,  
So I think you had better be kind  
And I had better be true,  
And let the old love go on  
Just as it used to do.

Baby Bell, by T. B. Aldrich, is another dainty little quarto, for the most part exquisitely illustrated, and telling its little tale of the little baby who came, and was welcomed, and loved, and lost again, with much simple pathos. Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare* is an old friend with a very



handsome new face, the most prominent features of which, after good paper and clear type, are some hundred and twenty illustrations, by Sir J. Gilbert, Birket Foster, and others. So, too, are *Excelsior*, and the general works of the same poet; the former, another hotpressed quarto, uniform with *Baby Bell* and *Farm Ballads*, but superior to both in respect of illustration; the latter a compact little library of eleven tiny but beautifully printed little volumes, neatly packed up in a handsome gilded box about six or seven inches cube. Then comes *Paul and Virginia*, beautifully printed, profusely illustrated, and with an admirable portrait of the author by way of frontispiece. *Picciola*, with ten spirited illustrations by Leopold Flameng; and Mr. Davenport Adams's *Book of Epigrams*, with its neatly arranged rows of "jewels five words long," from the various workshops of the last three hundred years and more, from Sir John Haryngton to Mr. Ashby-Sterry, bring us to the end of our grown-up books and land us pleasantly in a little batch of regular boys' stories. Foremost, of course, amongst which we welcome our glorious old friend *Robinson Crusoe*; a handsome but not too gorgeous edition, such as Tom or Harry can take back to school with him, and pore over by firelight in the winter evenings before the lamps are lit. Then another *Swiss Family Robinson*; then a new edition of that fine breezy old sea-yarn, *The Green Hand*, and a capital story by Madam Colmet, called *Uncle Chesterton's Heir*. As for the annual, *Mysterious Disappearance of Mr. Redworth*—which, by-the-way, does not mean that Mr. Redworth disappears annually under mysterious circumstances—that is a story for readers of any age. A real sensation novel, boiled down to one short volume instead of three long ones, and with the mystery well sustained throughout. I can't help thinking someone ought to have been hanged, though of course I am not going to betray confidence by even a hint as to the quarter in which the suspensory process should be applied. But I suppose at Christmas-time this would be incongruous.

After which we come to a batch of more distinctly seasonable books still. If *Every Boy's* and *Every Girl's Annuals* do not find their way into the hands of every boy and girl, so much the worse for the girls and boys neglected in the distribution. Let us hope, however, that they will at all events be compensated by a copy of Pro-

fessor Hoffman's *Drawing-room Amusements*, a book in which everyone who proposes—as, of course, every conscientious paterfamilias does propose—giving a juvenile party during the ensuing festive season, should invest without a moment's delay. Am I going to tell you how to make raisin tortoises and lemon pigs; how to "slip" cards and "palm" cards, and guess the card thought of, and work the "alternate card trick," and deal all the trumps into your own hand, and other delightfully wicked devices of the kind; how to engineer waxwork exhibitions and shadow pantomimes; how to leave the room with two legs and come back with six; how to select your charade or your play; how to construct your stage, to paint your scenery, or to make-up your face to any age from nine years old to ninety-and-nine? Let me assure you that I have not the slightest intention of doing anything whatever of the kind. I know all about it myself after studying Professor Hoffman, of course, and a great deal more. If you have any desire to be equally learned, you cannot do better than consult Professor Hoffman for yourself.

If this should not satisfy you, and you want to be learned in more sedate fashion, or perhaps to instil such learning pleasantly into your juvenile clientèle, get Mr. Woods' volume of *Picture Natural History*. I have learned one thing from it at all events. I always used to think—didn't you?—that the famous Snapping Turtle had his habitat only in the truthful pages of the great Bon Gualtier. Look at page six of Mr. Woods' second part, and there you will find him. Not altogether as large as life, perhaps, but quite as natural.

If you don't want to learn anything at all, but only wish to be amused—and really at Christmas-time there is something to be said in behalf of such a desire—here are story-books galore, of all sorts and sizes, true tales and fanciful tales, Sunday tales and workday tales, fairy tales, and tales of everyday people like you and me. Here are the *Seven Champions of Christendom*, compiled from the most ancient chronicles and records, and all other authentic and reliable sources of information. A capital story-book, none the worse—in my eyes, at all events—for the pleasant old crusted flavour that still hangs about it even in its modern guise. Then we have an entirely new batch of fairy tales in the shape of

Uncle Joe's Stories, by Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen. I don't find quite that delicious abandon about Mr. Hugessen's stories which forms the real charm of the good old-fashioned fairy tale. But there is plenty of fun about them all the same, and they are about the best I know nowadays. More Dolls, and Only a Cat are not fairy stories, but they are very good reading for all that; the latter, moreover, inculcating, in unobtrusive but not ineffective fashion, the useful lesson of kindness to animals; while Golden Light, and The Picture History of England are not stories at all, but handsome spoonfuls of pictorial jam, in which the cunningly commingled powder of historical or scriptural lore may slip down comparatively untasted. Then should any faint suspicion of the doctor's shop linger about the palate after all, here is a whole basin of sugar in the shape of Prinne's Fairy Library, a smart little green and gold casket containing no fewer than ten little volumes of real fairy tales without any hyperdidactic flavour about them at all.

As for Little Wideawake, who heads the list for the little ones, if I were a mamma—which I am happy to say I am not, finding papaship quite sufficient—I should assuredly buy him, if it were only for the sake of the little laddie on the cover. The interior would be worthy of the binding, if it could, and is in truth a pleasant mixture of old stories and new; among the former being our old friend Sindbad, the sight of whom arouses in my mind the question: How is it that in this forest of holiday volumes, ancient and modern, through which I am only just beginning at last to see my way, I have not come across a single Arabian Nights? There is something wrong here, or my youthful judgment must have been remarkably astray.

Happy Day Stories appears to be a re-issue of some spirited drawings of children by Mrs. Houghton, with new stories written to them; whilst The Child's Picture Scrapbook, and Little Snowdrop's and Little Violet's Picture Books consist simply of so many collections of pictures, small and large, of various kinds, with a few sentences or even a few words of illustrative letterpress. Taken in connection with a box of paints, these little volumes will no doubt find their uses on a rainy afternoon. Schnick Schnack, and Chimes and Rhymes, on the other hand, have their illustrations already coloured,

and very well coloured too. And finally, Aunt Effie's Rhymes strikes out an altogether new line, giving us not only amusing rhyme, appropriately illustrated in Hablot Browne's happiest vein, but the music—and very pretty music, too—to which to sing them.

And so we arrive at last at the paper toy-books, with their brilliant blue and red and green and yellow wrappers, and upon my word, I hardly know if they are not after all, from an artistic point of view, the gems of the whole library. The Children's Musical Cinderella, indeed, rejoices, not only in capital illustrations, quaintly and gorgeously coloured after the manner of the pope's guard or a glorified court suit of trumps, but in a regular musical score to its rhymed story. But John Gilpin and The House that Jack Built rely solely upon the artist's pencil, and very thoroughly is their confidence justified. That worthy linendraper and gallant trainband captain must surely himself have sat to Mr. Caldecott for that inimitable portrait. And there are two—I might almost say three—characters in the tragi-comedy of the famous house which eclipse this altogether. I am not speaking of Jack himself, who, I confess, is not to my mind adequately represented by that old gentleman in drab shorts and a red waistcoat; nor do I refer to the priest, though he is a jovial old ecclesiastic enough; nor to the forlorn, but easily-consoled maiden; nor even to the very free-and-easy gentleman in the tattered and torn habiliments by whom she is consoled, and who, it must be admitted, has a pleasant air of debonair vagabondism which suggests a capability of consoling any number of damsels under any combination of circumstances. These are the comic characters of the piece, and it is into the tragic element that the artist has thrown his full power. The three personages of the drama whose brief career is thus immortalised all come to an untimely end. The cat is, perhaps, the least striking of the three, though there is a grim humour pervading her earlier proceedings which is highly effective. But a more delightful villain than the rat never ran on four legs. The ineffable air of injured innocence with which he sits up upon the empty measure, and with moustache erect, and outspread palms, proclaims to men and cats his absolute ignorance of the very flavour of malt is simply admirable. As to the dog, I really doubt if the

great Van Dyck of dogdom himself could have improved upon his portrait, as we first catch sight of him under the corner of the wall, meditating what mischief he shall be up to next. He is a true pariah, that brindled rascal, with the demonstrative ribs, the ruefully hanging lip, and the backward look in his little twinkling eye; brought up from earliest puppyhood on a far more liberal allowance of kicks than of the bones and scraps which, as I take it, form the halfpence of canine currency. But all the kicks in Christendom won't knock the fun out of that young reprobate's cheery soul. I'll wager a pound—of greaves—that he is sore with his last drubbing even now; but if he is not already meditating some fresh means of deserving another, I am no reader of the canine countenance. And, sure enough, there sits puss, demurely licking her lips after her late conflict. Ha! ha! how he in his turn sits presently in the grassy path and grins with fatuous delight over his successful tussle with that deluded cat! And his face, as he culminates in mid-air, and casts a downward glance of horror upon the crumpled horn of the too swift Nemesis below! Yes; decidedly I shall have to expend another shilling for little Master Tommy's behoof, and keep that brindled reprobate for my own private gallery.

I have kept one especial volume till the last, not being quite sure whether it had not slipped accidentally into my batch of Christmas literature. Personally speaking, it has hitherto seemed to me that the subject with which it deals is one about which we have almost had enough for our Christmas needs in the columns of the daily papers. But this was when I only looked at the solid pages of closely-printed debate without attempting to read them. The result of that attempt has been, to convince me that Messrs. Routledge are right and I was wrong. There are a great many little people—and some big ones, I am afraid, now painfully occupied with unwonted holiday-tasks in the great class-rooms of St. Stephen's—to whom a nice little yellow volume about Afghanistan, its political and military history, geography, and ethnology, including a full account of the wars of 1839-42, and an appendix on the prospects of a Russian invasion of India, would be, if not a very acceptable Christmas-box, a very useful one indeed.

## ALL OR NOTHING.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

AUTHOR OF "A HOUSE OF CARDS," "GRIFFITH'S DOUBLE," &c. &c.

### CHAPTER XXV. THE BLUEBEARD BUREAU.

JANET was much grieved by the explanation that had taken place between herself and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and his sudden departure from Bevis added to her discomfiture. She had been so absolutely innocent of coquetry, of intention of misleading him, of perception of his feelings towards her and the extent to which he was misleading himself, that she could not take blame to herself in the matter, but was entirely given over to wonder and regret. To wonder, genuine and deep, that she should have been found so pleasing in the sight of a man of the world like Esdaile; that he should have come to love her so well as she could not doubt he did love her; and regret, very profound and poignant, for the pain that he must suffer, from which she could not save him. She could only hope that it would not last long; and that the future might hold within its possibilities a friendship with him, untroubled by the remembrance of this misplaced love. He had read her secret, he knew why it was that he must not hope, must not try, for a reversal of her sentence; and Janet shrank from that consciousness, not with any doubt of his honour and loyalty, but because of the additional sense which it gave her of having crossed and troubled his life. Esdaile's discovery had already deprived his friend of his company; if he were less high-minded than Janet took him to be, it would deprive Dunstan of his friendship also, and thus become a double misery to her. She would have been thrown into dismay and confusion if Sir Wilfrid had again spoken to her; and yet she sometimes wished that she could see him, and could make up her mind to ask him, if only because of what his quickened observation had enabled him to read in her face on that last evening, not to withdraw himself from Dunstan. Janet possessed the excellent gift of sympathy, and yet in this case she was entirely unable to understand and estimate the pain that the mere sight of Dunstan inflicted on Esdaile; and when Dunstan complained that Sir Wilfrid had "thrown him over," and bemoaned his own disappointment, Janet felt herself guilty in this too, that she had, however unwittingly, come between the friends whose



mutual regard she had invested with the loftiness, disinterestedness, and constancy which made up her own ideal of friendship.

In the keen distress which Janet suffered, the dispersion of her own illusion as to Julia's meaning, in the brief confidence that had marked their parting, had very little share. Julia had not made any allusion to this in writing, and she would divine the truth, most likely, when she should learn that Sir Wilfrid had left Bevis. Janet could not tell her; she well knew how much pained she would be; and now, when she fully understood Julia's meaning, she felt that Julia would be unable to forgive her. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was in Julia's eyes what he was in those of John Sandilands—a fortunate prince of fairy-tale times—and that he should ask and not have, that there should exist anyone so foolishly and so ill disposed as to say No to him—would be intolerable in Julia's sight. He had loved her from the first; he had told her so, and Julia had seen it! But she had not seen it, had not dreamed of it; in her own absorption of mind and heart she had never thought that to others she seemed free and to be won. What a world of cross-purposes was this, thought Janet, who had but a glimpse of them; and how hard it seemed that the love of a kind and manly heart, which would have made another woman, for whom she was day by day learning to care more and more, profoundly happy, should be given to herself, who could not reward or prize it.

With this fresh access of her sorrow there came a resolution to Janet. Amabel should know the truth; there should be no additional delusion or heart-burning in this unhappy matter, if plain speaking on Janet's part, however painful to her, could avert it. The bright, odd, enthusiastic, hard-to-manage girl had become very dear to the friend who was so strangely unlike her, for other reasons than the almost worshipping affection with which Amabel regarded her. That it should fall to her lot to cross Amabel's path, Janet felt was also very hard; if she had not been there what would have been more likely than that Sir Wilfrid should have been attracted by Amabel; and now her unlucky presence had brought trouble and sorrow on two people who loved her—two of the very few in all the world to whom she meant anything.

Janet had not to wait long for an

opportunity of telling Amabel what was in her mind; her pale face and evident suffering brought quick questions from the impetuous girl.

"Something has happened to you Janet! What is it? You have been crying."

Amabel was on her knees with her arms round Janet in a moment, and Janet told her, as well as she could for her tears.

The girl's pretty face grew pale and fixed, but the clasp of her arms was tighter as she listened to Janet's broken words, and gathered from them that she dreaded the significance of them to her. She did not interrupt them once, but when they were ended she said:

"Poor Sir Wilfrid! I knew there was trouble before him; I saw it in his face from the first, and who knows better than I what a trouble this is! Janet! If I were a man and loved you, in his place I should kill myself."

She loosed her hold of Janet, and sank into her favourite attitude upon the floor, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes fixed on Janet's face.

"And so my presentiment is out, and great harm has come to him."

"And to you, dearest, to you!" sobbed Janet.

"No," said Amabel, "not to me. I do care for him; I like him very much; I have the strangest feeling about him, as if I could see something dimly, through a veil, that is terrible in his life; I might have loved him well enough to have been the happiest woman in the world if he had loved me or the most wretched if he had not, but that I have always known——"

"What, Amabel?"

"That he loved you, dear, and that there would be no chance for him. I don't say I am quite happy, I don't say I can quite like my life now that he is gone away out of it—so far away and forever too—for he will never come to Bevis again; but there is no disappointment; remember that. I never made any mistake about it, and I am not broken-hearted."

"And you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! Because he loves you! Yes, indeed, for how could he help it? Because you don't love him? Well, that's another, and a harder matter; but neither can you help it. Don't fret about me, Janet; indeed you need not, for I only grieve for him, and like him all the better that he loves you."

"You have the most generous nature in the world."

"Not I. I am only reasonable, in spite of all my fancifulness, and I know some price must be paid for every blessing one has in this life. In sober seriousness you are my best blessing. And, Janet, I must tell you something; it is not only my presentiment about Sir Wilfrid that is fulfilled in this, it is a presentiment that I had about you also. It was the very first day I saw you; and you know"—here Amabel smiled, though with only a dim ghost of her usual brightness—"I, as well as poor Sir Wilfrid, fell in love with you on the spot; and it came over my mind, or my fancy, or my nerves, or whatever it is that receives those unaccountable impressions for which everybody except you scolds me or laughs at me, that either you would do me, or I should do you, some harm in days to come. It passed away immediately, just as a shiver—which that sort of thing is like in the mind—passes over one's body and is gone; but it had been, and now it comes back to me. This is the harm you were to do me, dearest Janet, you see it is not much."

"Ah, I do not think so. But at all events, it is I who have done you, however unintentionally, harm. As for you, you will do me nothing but good all the days of my life."

"I hope so," said Amabel.

The two friends said much more to one another, but Amabel did not explain to Janet why it was that she had known from the first there was no chance for Sir Wilfrid.

After this they discussed the matter no further, but they were even more drawn towards each other than before, and additionally companionable, if more silent. To both the inexorably bad weather was welcome; neither felt disposed to be subject just then to any scrutiny more discerning than that of Mrs. Ainslie, who recognised no ills except her own, and that of Mr. Ainslie, who held that the climate of England was enough to account for anything concerning anybody. The weather, which kept the dwellers at The Chantry in, did not however keep Captain Dunstan out. He came thither nearly every day, grumbled with Mr. Ainslie, sang with Miss Monroe, and made himself generally agreeable. So the year drew to its close.

Christmas had come and gone, with its pleasures of beneficence and its pains of memory, and the season, which she

especially dreaded, had proved a happy time, on the whole, for Janet. The schools, and the almshouse women, the old people in the village, to which Bevis stood in the relation of the "great house," all the claimants of those bounties which are so much enhanced by personal solicitude and kindness in the bestowal of them, were saved from the neglect she had feared, as a consequence of the death of Mrs. Drummond, by the active liberality of Captain Dunstan. Janet had returned to Bury House a few days before Christmas, but not until she had, at Captain Dunstan's request, furnished him with a statement of all that Mrs. Drummond had been wont to do for the benefit of her neighbours at Christmas-time, and arranged with Mrs. Manners—who was much mollified by Dunstan's amended behaviour with regard to Miss Monroe—for large benefactions of beef and pudding to the waifs and strays, towards whom Janet felt more kindness than the sternly-practical vicar altogether approved.

A hard frost in the beginning of January succeeded the wet weather of the close of December, and the hunting with which Edward Dunstan had hoped to beguile the tedium of his stay at Bevis was impossible. That tedium did not, however, greatly beset him. He made plans for the disposal of himself after the date up to which he meant to remain, and he even began to think with less reluctance than he would have believed possible a short time previously, about London in the season; but, apart from the curiosity with which he regarded the "Bluebeard bureau" as he called it, he was in no particular hurry for the interval to pass. His life was, as a matter of fact, a pleasant one, and even his hurt pride and baffled passion could not altogether resist the stubbornness of facts. He had thoroughly qualified himself to break the seals of the packet in the Bluebeard bureau. The long delayed message from the dead had received all respect and attention from him. It had made him regard Janet Monroe with additional curiosity, and enhanced the interest in her that he already felt. He remembered what Esdaile had once said about his sense of the arbitrariness of fate in its respective dealings with himself and with John Sandilands, and he applied it to the difference between Janet's destiny and his own.

Captain Dunstan liked the society of

women, and especially of such as were womanly. He was not to be won by fashion, or even by personal attractions—which, however, rarely exist in such anomalous individuals—to admire women who hunt, who “walk with the guns,” look on at the slaughter of pigeons, pretend to understand horse-racing, talk the slang of the gaming saloon, and offer at all points a melancholy and contemptible spectacle to those who wish well to the individuals and to the human race. He had too much good taste and too much sense of humour to be moved to any feeling save disgust and ridicule by the deplorable freaks of modern young ladyhood in these and other objectionable directions, and he had found a few specimens of the prevailing mode, in the neighbourhood of Bevis, very irksome and oppressive to him. Amabel and Janet were both, in their far different ways, on their different levels, essentially womanly, and much to Dunstan's taste. It never occurred to him to ask himself whether, if he could have forgotten Laura and her treachery to him he should have fallen in love with either of them, because he could not forget Laura, and her treachery had closed the book of love for him, and put it away from among his studies; he simply liked the two girls, and sought their society, especially that of Janet, with a growing pleasure. Her thoroughness, her simplicity, her quiet courage, her utter ignorance of the world, which contrasted with the considerable knowledge she had acquired from books, invested her with a charm largely aided by her grace and beauty.

On the 10th of January, Captain Dunstan said to himself: “This is the day for the Bluebeard bureau. I will open the mysterious packet after breakfast.” And, while he ate that meal, he once more perused Mrs. Drummond's letter of instructions.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cathcart, at the vicarage, presiding over the vicar's repast, which he, being a great reader of newspapers, rarely enlivened with conversation, was also thinking of the Bluebeard bureau, wondering at what time Dunstan would open the packet, how soon, and under what pretext he would reveal the secret of its contents to her.

Having waited until there should be little or no chance of his encountering an inquisitive housemaid in the Admiral's Corridor, or Mrs. Manners herself on a

tour of inspection, Captain Dunstan proceeded to the unused rooms, in whose silent and speckless orderliness there was something oppressive to his fancy. Unlocking the little door of the central space of the old bureau for the second time, he took out the parchment-covered packet, on which his own name was written by Mrs. Drummond's hand, carried it to the library, and began the examination of its contents.

These proved to be two documents; a narrow slip of paper was folded round each, and they were numbered respectively One and Two.

Number One was a more imposing document than the other, and even when folded, and before the labelled slip of paper was removed, it looked legal.

Number Two was simply a letter.

Captain Dunstan removed the slip of paper from Number One, which he unfolded and smoothed out upon the table before him. It needed only a glance to show him that he had under his eyes a will. With the usual preamble, in fair legal text, expressed with perfect distinctness, the document before him bequeathed to Janet Monroe—who was named in it in terms of the warmest affection—the estate of Bevis, and all the other property of every kind of which the testatrix should die possessed. The will was duly signed and attested; and with the first shock of an overwhelming surprise, there came over Dunstan a rush of desperate anger. He had then been mocked and fooled; made to believe himself the owner of Bevis for three months to gratify Mrs. Drummond's fantastic spite, or her silly fancy! This thought was, however, but a lightning-flash; for the next instant his eye caught the date of the will. It was six months earlier than that of the document by which Mrs. Drummond had bequeathed Bevis to him. His own position was secure; her intention had changed, and at sufficient interval to do away with the idea of caprice; the sentiments she expressed in the letter which had been so long of reaching him were her final sentiments; again he had wronged her in his swift thoughts.

He reperused the will. There could be no mistake about it. Janet Monroe, she of whom Mrs. Drummond had said that she regarded her as a daughter, she who was in a manner committed to his care, had been designated as the future owner of all



that was now his by Mrs. Drummond, who had only, as she said, her own free will to consult. She was the one person in all the world whom Mrs. Drummond loved; why had she changed her purpose towards her? It was a righteous purpose. Janet deserved from Mrs. Drummond all that she had to give; Janet would have made good use of it; her claim was a sounder one than his own. So did the truth come home in a moment of clear-seeing to Edward Dunstan. Whence had come the change? Eagerly Dunstan turned from the document, Number One, to the letter, Number Two. In this he would find the explanation, no doubt.

The contents of Number Two were as follows:

"I address you, Edward, on the supposition that you will have acted in conformity with the communication from me that is to reach you with the notification of my death; that you will have acquired the right to read these lines, and to become acquainted with the secret which must never be known to anyone but yourself. I write on the supposition that you have resided three months at Bevis, that you have won the esteem and regard of Janet Monroe, and that you neither are, nor are intending to place yourself, under any engagement to marry. These things being so, the case in which it is my wish to make you acquainted with the fact to be revealed to you by the paper marked Number One has arisen, and you will now receive my last communication, which I make to you in the strictest and most solemn confidence, and which will have, when it reaches you, the additionally solemn sanction that the never-to-be-broken silence of death will have been for so long between us.

"It is to Janet Monroe—to her nobility of mind, her disinterestedness, her firmness—that you owe the possession of Bevis, and of all I have left to you. You see that it was all to have been hers, and you will readily believe the alteration did not originate with me. Made aware of my intention, she most earnestly entreated me to forego it; and, failing in that, she positively assured me that it would be useless for me to attempt to put it in force, as nothing should induce her to accept the legacy of the estate and fortune, that she persisted in believing to be your inheritance by right. She succeeded. I yielded to her earnest prayer; and, had she known that I had actually made the

will, of which I spoke to her only as a thing intended to be done, I have no doubt she would have insisted on my letting her destroy it with her own hands, so that you might never by any accident come to the knowledge that it had existed, and that in this, too, Janet would have succeeded. If you have gained the right to read these lines, you know by this time what manner of woman she is whom I would have had to fill my place here, and that there is none which she would not adorn. No one, however, but yourself and myself can ever know all the truth about Janet. And now I am going to tell you why I have recorded this truth, so that it should come to your knowledge after the preparation that I have contrived. It is because, having done you all the good in my power in one way for Janet's sake—there will be nothing due to my memory from you on that score—I would like to do you a far greater good for your own; and because, having renounced the dear hope that she would be here after me, in her own right, to keep up the remembrance of us and the tradition of the past, the same hope in another form has stolen back into my old heart. I believe that you, as you will be when you read this, in Janet's confidence, her friend, the witness of her good and blameless life, could win her for your wife, if you wish to do so; and that if you do wish it, and do win her, the good I am now doing you is as far beyond what I have already done you as blessedness is beyond wealth. Should this not be so—should there never be a closer tie than that of friendship between you and Janet Monroe, this that I am doing can be no wrong; for it will make you know how noble a heart is that in which you will have secured a friend's place; and for the rest, the fancy that is not to become fact, the hope that is not to be realised, they will remain for ever a dead secret with the dead."

Mrs. Cathcart remained at home the whole of the day on the 10th of January, in the expectation, which she did not quite admit to herself, of Captain Dunstan's calling at the Vicarage. He did not come; and the following day also passed without her seeing or hearing anything of him. It was not until the 12th that he presented himself, and she perceived a curious change in his look and manner. He entered at once upon the subject of which they were both thinking, and

with straightforward seriousness told Mrs. Cathcart that he found himself unable to reveal the nature of the disclosure which had been made to him. "It has no present concern," he added, "for anyone, and merely referred to a matter which Mrs. Drummond considered it necessary that I, as her heir, should be informed of. The delay in my receiving her first letter turns out to be of no consequence, and the whole affair is of absolutely no interest or importance."

"You look as if you had done more thinking over this absolutely unimportant affair than you ever did in your life before," was Mrs. Cathcart's mental comment upon this explanation which explained nothing; but she was too well-bred to let the slightest doubt or disappointment appear; and her smiling "How fortunate," and immediate easy introduction of some subject indefinitely removed from the topic under taboo, set her visitor at ease at once. In a few minutes she found that he was taking the lead in the conversation, and that its direction was towards Janet Monroe. Her love for the place that had been her home for so long; her quiet tastes, her refinement, and cultivation; of these things Dunstan spoke in a way that seemed to provoke a question. At last Mrs. Cathcart asked it, point blank.

"Have you anything particular to say to me about Janet? Has anything happened?"

"Yes," replied Dunstan; "and I wished to tell you myself, because you are such a good friend to her and to me. I have asked her to come back to Bevis. I know you will be glad. I have asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

Mrs. Cathcart did not speak for a full minute; then she said: "I never was more glad of anything in my life." And then, with striking inconsistency, she burst into tears.

"And now for a bit of news"—so ran the closing paragraph of a letter from Edward Dunstan to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, written that same night, to reach him just before he was to leave England on an excursion, of which nothing was settled except that it was to be a distant one—"which will interest you, and surprise you, too. I shall want the cats'-eyes after all, and Lady Esdaile shall have another set.

You can guess what I mean. I did not think of it when you were here; but I know it's the best thing I can do, and that you will think so. I have asked Miss Monroe to marry me—I asked her yesterday; she has said 'Yes,' and she is most anxious you should know, and sends you all sorts of pleasant messages. Don't you think I'm right? Of course, there's no nonsense about this; that is over—well over, too, no doubt, and the new leaf I have turned will have no follies writ large on it, I hope. Nothing is settled, of course; but there is nothing particular for us to wait for, and so you must not be long away," &c.

At the hour when Edward Dunstan was writing these lines, little thinking of the feelings of unavailing regret and pity they would arouse in Esdaile, Janet was kneeling in the deep bay of the window of her room at Bury House, her folded arms upon the window-sill, her face turned to the moonlight lying in silver bars upon the frost-bound earth, with radiant joy and peace and thankfulness in it not contradicted by the tears in her eyes. For Janet, in that quiet hour of unequalled happiness and hope, was not thinking only of her lover; not only of the great bliss that had come into her life, to glorify it for evermore; not only of the beauty and the sweetness and the wonder of life with love acknowledged and returned in it; but also of the friend who was gone, and the interpretation of her bright slow-falling tears was: "If she could but see me now! If she could only know how it is with me!"

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